

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

The Sense of Scale Thirty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday,
November 25, 2015 8:15 AM Dn 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28; **Lk 21:12-19** (St.
Catherine of Alexandria, virgin and martyr) (If we have a sense of scale, we realize that our
lives are very insignificant in the history of God's creation. We are invited to make a
contribution, but that contribution cannot be simply within the context of our little life scale.)

“By your perseverance you will secure your lives.”

The theme in the last several days has been the theme of persecution. Judaism was born as a contemporary religion in persecution. Whatever happened prior to the Babylonian exile, we are not too sure. We know they had all kinds of traditions, but the Bible we have, we call **the Old Testament, really was written from the standpoint of the Babylonian exile** that began in 587, lasted for fifty years. Fifty years was a long time when people only lived to be 30.

Now what happened at that time has influenced the world greatly because it **created a particular religious way of life** that was related to, although not identical with the background of Jesus and his mother and foster father. And **Jesus grew up relating to that life**, responding to it, reacting against it, and from him proceeded, of course, more teachings, more example, more witnessing, more the power of the Holy Spirit, and of course eventually his own persecution and death, and another stage of persecution in the forming of the Jesus people that we call the Christian Church. And that has continued through the ages.

All those who have sustained themselves, who have remained faithful, have had to have one thing in common. They have to have a sense of scale—a sense of scale. As I said, in the ancient world people only lived until they were 30; now people are living much longer. But still a lifetime is nothing. **If we have a sense of scale, we realize that our lives are very insignificant in the history of God's creation. We are invited to make a contribution, but that contribution cannot be simply within the context of our little life scale.** If we confine ourselves to what we know and what we can foresee, we will not be significant. We have to live

for something more. All the martyrs have lived for something more. All the confessors have lived for something more. All the saints have lived for something more. And at times they have been willing to give up their lives on earth in order to **witness to something more**. That's what Jesus is talking about here. Sometimes we have too, if we have that sense of scale, if we know there is something more, if that's what we live for and in. **It can't just be ideas or thoughts we have once in a while. It has to be a reality we live. Then we really witness to something, what Jesus called the kingdom of God, a reality trying to break into human life, freely welcoming and inviting people into it, but not pushing itself, not by any sort of force or violence supplanting what already is.**

That's why Isaiah said when the Messiah comes, **"A bruised reed he shall not break; a smoldering wick he shall not quench."** God's ways are not the ways of force and power as we know it or as we think of it. So Jesus is talking about our need to prepare ourselves. It's not a matter of thinking what we are going to say. Jesus will give us the words. **It's rather a matter of rooting ourselves in the reality of the kingdom of God**, something whose scale of time is far greater than our lives, into which we can insert our lives or not, again, our choice.

So as we move toward the end of the Church year, which officially ends on Saturday, the Church wants us to think about: **What is really valuable? What is really important? Reflecting on this past year, reflecting on the year to come, what changes do we need to make?**